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MENTAL, HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

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Abstract

The article highlights certain prerequisites of mental, historical and geopolitical differences between Ukraine and Russia. Peculiarities of the Ukrainian mentality in comparison with the Russian mentality were studied. The historical origins of Ukraine's belonging to European civilization were outlined. Deep contradictions in the geopolitical orientations of Russia and Ukraine were identified. The current armed conflict has been going on for the ninth year, which exceeds the average duration of modern wars. The historical extent of the Russian-Ukrainian war is caused by an inter-civilizational clash. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation against the countries of the West have already radically affected international security and international relations. The author assumes that the modern war has deep foundations due to significant differences between Ukraine and Russia. These differences include a complex of mental historical and geopolitical components.

Key words

Russian aggression, NATO, EU, geopolitics, inter-civilizational clash, international security.

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1. Introduction

The current armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been going on for the ninth year, which exceeds the average duration of modern wars. The historical extent of the Russian-Ukrainian war can be explained by the fact that it is an inter-civilizational clash. According to S.P. Huntington's observations (1996), in particular wars on the verge of a civilization split last on average longer than "normal" wars within individual civilizations. The Russian invasion

of Ukraine and the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation against the countries of the West have already radically affected international security and international relations. The author assumes that the current war has deep foundations due to significant differences between Ukraine and Russia. These dissimilarities include a complex of mental, historical and geopolitical components. The relevance of the study results from the later wave of Russian expansion in the world.

Separate aspects of this matter are the subjects of scientists' research interest. In particular, the following scientists have touched upon the topic: P. Gay-Nizhnik (2017), V.P. Horbulin (2017), T. Kuzio (2017), E. Mahda (2017), H.M. Perepelytsya, (2015), I.P. Rushchenko (2015), K. Smaglyi (2018), V. Tkachenko (2016), O.V. Zadorozhnyi (2015) and others. However, further aggressive actions of the Russian Federation and attempts to strengthen Russian influence on Western countries require further analysis.

2. Data and methods

The purpose of this article lies in highlighting certain prerequisites of mental, historical and geopolitical differences between Ukraine and Russia. The realization of the defined goal took place by solving the following tasks: showing the roots of the Ukrainian mentality in comparison with the Russian one, outlining the historical origins of Ukraine's belonging to European and Euro-Atlantic civilization, determining profound differences in the geopolitical orientations between Russia and Ukraine and the role of the West in realizing this.

The objective of the survey and its tasks determined the methodological choices. The gnoseological basis of the study consisted of general scientific and special scientific methods. The research is based on the principles of objectivity, complexity, and historicism. The following are among the used special-historical methods: systemic approach to history, comparative historical method, chronological analysis of the problem range, source study. The research contributed to the purposeful study and objective highlighting of mental, historical and geopolitical differences between Ukraine and Russia.

3. Results and discussion

The European vocation adsorbs Ukraine's self-awareness in the modern European context, combining it with a practical instruction, namely organizing the process of gaining membership in European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The historical and psychological roots of Ukrainian prudence in decision-making, tolerance of interpersonal and inter-ethnic relations, approach to economy with a certain frugality and enthusiasm have their origins in the peculiarities of Ukrainian people's lifestyle. Accordingly, this influenced the formation of, in many respects, similar national character mental features of the absolute majority of Ukrainians. The Ukrainian people are characterized

by an individual form of goal-setting and personal responsibility for the consequences of their achievements. This results in the emergence of such an individual who would be capable of consciously creating a civil society. According to academician O. Kyrychuk:

the state emerges where there is a highly developed expression of will, where there is a corresponding dynamic that associates equal-side or "divergent" competitions of strong individuals, as it is in Europe, or where a passive and indifferent general public does not know how to resist the will of a despot, obeying him, as we see in Russia. We [Ukrainians], belonging to Europe, have moved too far from it to develop the willpower necessary to build our own state, but we have not come close enough to Asia to surrender ourselves to our own despot (Kyrychuk, 1994, p. 14).

The main principle of Ukrainian life is "to each their own". It aptly reflects an ancient desire to be an owner, a master or a landlord. Parenthetically, it is worth emphasizing one characteristic feature: the Ukrainian mentality formation does not depend on the purity of ethnic origin. On Ukrainian soil, the Ukrainian element always wins, prompting the national definition of a person as a representative of the Ukrainian nation. Located at the very center of Europe, with a favorable geographical location and rich natural resources, Ukraine is a kind of buffer between aggressive Russia and the Western world. It was forced to constantly show dichroism in its political activity under the influence of determinants that did not always purely reflect Ukrainian national interests. V. Lypyns'kyi once said:

the main difference between Ukraine and Moscow is not language, tribe, or faith (...) but a different political system created over the ages, a different (...) way of organizing the ruling class, a different relationship between upper and lower classes, state and citizens (Lypyns'kyi, 1926, p. 43).

Authoritarianism is also a significant destructive component of the Russian mentality. Russia is immanent in its eternal indecisiveness, bifurcation, and non-acceptance of either Western or Eastern standards and values. Marquis De Kyustyn rightly remarked back in 1839:

Moscow nature is a savage nature, indifferent to the sanctity of the given word, to any true feeling, to the sense of justice. Everything in it is a triumphant lie, deceit and deception, the lack of any moral sense, the absence of the concept of right and duty (De Kyustyn, 2008).

Ukraine is a Central European country. For example, Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians have a desire for hetmanship no less developed than Ukrainians.

Indeed, they tried with all their might to escape from the Warsaw Pact, where the so-called “elder brother” was in charge, gaining independence at the first opportunity. But the same Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Hungarians gladly joined another association – NATO, built on other principles. That is, the matter is not the hypertrophied desire to become hetman, but the natural appeal to the principles of unification (Kravchuk, 1998).

Modern Ukraine is formally a young subject of political and economic relations in the geostrategic space of Europe and the world, but it has deep roots of European and Euro-Atlantic vocation. A cursory look at the map of prehistoric Europe proves that for thousands of years, since the Late Paleolithic and Neolithic periods, the roughly modern Ukrainian-Russian border has been the boundary between different civilizational types of human existence. That is to say, a specific mental, ethnic, cultural and geopolitical type of society has been formed in the geospace of the Northern Black Sea region since the ancient times. All later local proto-state polyethnic formations, such as Cimmerian, Scythian, Sarmatian, Proto-Slavic (1st millennium BC – 1st millennium AD), arose based on the same civilizational geopolitics. The formation of Kyivan Rus was the cornerstone of that complex process. Conventionally, this proto-Ukrainian civilization (from the 3rd millennium BC to the 10th century) can be called “Pontic” one. It has always been racially and culturally connected with the Balkans and Asia Minor (Bahan, 2002).

Since ancient times, modern Ukrainian lands have been an integral part of European civilization. At the end of the 6th century BC, the Scythians managed to stop the expansion of the Persian leader Darius I. The “Father of History”, Herodotus managed the first detailed description of the national territory in the 5th century BC. Ancient polises in the south of modern Ukraine lands were influencing the modernization of the Northern Black Sea region. It was Scythian bread that ensured the flourishing of classical Hellenic civilization. People from Scythia were responsible for public order protection in Athens during the rise of the democratic system of government. The second Roman Pope St. Clement was exiled to Chersonesos and founded the first monastery in Inkerman. The Pontic kings defended the eastern borders of the Roman state, and the Sarmatian legion protected the interests of Rome in distant Britain. That is, it is safe to say that Ukrainian lands have been within the boundaries of the ancient paradigm since ancient times. At all stages of human civilizational development, economic factors have played a significant role in the relations between countries and peoples; formed a living fabric of interstate

relations, filling them with real content; created opportunities for a wide mutual exchange of material and spiritual cultural assets. An unbiased analysis of the last millennium events proves that Ukrainian presence in Europe was a completely natural and organic phenomenon (Todorov, 2006).

The dominant role in this case belonged to the economic aspect. It should be noted that, due to its geopolitical position, Ukraine has experienced the cross influences of the Asian nomadic, Eastern-Byzantine and Western European worlds, adapting to them in different ways. And yet the decisive vector of the country’s socio-cultural and political orientation was Western European civilization. At one time, the classics of Ukrainian state-building noted that the Ukrainian people are a people of Western culture – one of the richest when it comes to Eastern, Oriental influences, but still of Western culture and spirit (Onofriychuk, 2016). This conclusion was based on a study of Ukrainian history in its organic and diverse connections with the Western world precisely as an important component of the pan-European historical process. The comparative characteristics of the socio-economic and political structures created by the Ukrainian people at all stages of historical development show that Ukraine mainly followed a path similar to the one of Central and Western European countries. This is indicated by the similarity between Kyivan Rus internal socio-economic systems and the European countries as well as by the extensive trade relations between them all. After the collapse of Kyivan Rus, numerous contacts with the countries of Central and Western Europe were maintained by the Principalities of Galicia-Volhynia, which united a significant part of Kyivan Rus lands during a period lasting from the mid-13th century and till the mid-14th century, existing as a united state at one time. The Kyiv principality, which included a certain part of Ukrainian lands, under the auspices of the House of Gediminids during the second half of the 14th and almost till the end of the 15th centuries also fits into the Western European political and economic context. During this period, large-scale trade processes, which were conducted in traditional ways, developed on Ukrainian lands. First of all, such trading centers as Kyiv, Lviv, Kamianets, Lutsk should be noted. From Kyiv, the way to Bavaria, the Rhineland, England, France, and Spain passed overland through Volodymyr, Krakow, and Prague. Through Pripiat, Bug and Neman (also known as Nemunas or Nio-man) lay the way to the Baltic Sea and Saxony. The activities of Genoa, Florence, Venice merchant families’ numerous representatives and many trade and banking enterprises were concentrated in Lviv. Cossacks wrote a vivid page in Ukraine’s alignment with

European values. Moreover, it should be added that the south of Ukraine, in particular the Crimea, was an interesting territory for medieval Italian trading republics, especially Genoa. In the end, regardless of the government form, social order or historical stage, Ukraine has firmly established its image of the European granary. At the same time, it would be wrong to narrow Ukraine's cooperation with Europe to one, albeit important, economic direction. Geopolitics is the main factor that establishes the identity of the Central-Eastern European countries and Ukraine. Despite all the differences, they have one thing in common, i.e. being objects that depended on and were invaded in numerous senses by Germany and Russia (in the past, also Sweden and Turkey). Each of these states sought to subjugate Central Europe, seeing it as their vital interest. In the west and south of Europe, Germany had trouble accommodating its surplus population, because in the past these areas were more developed and more densely populated. A suitable place could be the Slavic East – weak and sparsely populated. In turn, Russia's advance on the west and southwest of Europe was connected both with the realization of an ideological goal ("Moscow is the third Rome") and with the opportunity to raise its level of civilization (by means of annexing those territories that were part of Western civilization) and to play the role of the European policy formation and regulation factor (Shchepans'kyy, 2004).

Ukraine was the first on Russia's western path. To a large extent, this determined the situation with foreign policy certainty in the first years of independence. At the same time, the so-called multi-vector nature, to a certain degree, was connected with internal aspects. The problem of the Ukrainian government was not the dismemberment of foreign policy between the East and the West, because it was supposed to be active and different in the Western and Eastern directions. Since Ukraine has declared independence, the double-sided approach to internal politics was a problem to solve. This duality encouraged a constant split. In the East of Ukraine it indulged in Russification, while it played the role of Ukrainianizer in the West. In the East, it protected the monuments of Lenin, while it blessed the monuments of Bandera in the West (Pavlychko, 2002). Worse still, instead of caring about the consolidation and unity of the Ukrainian nation, there had been examples of open hostility between eastern and western parts of Ukraine, which were provoked by representatives of the authorities, who relied on Moscow political technologists.

But it was the implementation of the European and Euro-Atlantic vocation that gave Ukraine the only chance to preserve its own identity. Common

democratic values have been challenged by the modern geopolitical situation. This has forced Ukraine and the entire Western civilization to adequately respond to Russia's aggressive policy. Democratic values are the result of humanity's long journey to self-respect. Their institutional consolidation at the beginning of the modern era became the basis for comprehensive achievements of human civilization during more than the last two hundred years.

In March 2014, the Russian Federation violated all the basic principles of international law. In particular, the Principle of Sovereign Equality of States, Non-Use of Force and Threat of Force, Inviolability of State Borders, Territorial Integrity (inviolability) of States, Peaceful Settlement of international disputes, Non-Interference in Internal Affairs, Human Rights Respect, Performance of the Undertaken Obligations, etc. Most of these principles are recorded in numerous international legal acts: the UN Charter (Statut..., 2005), the Declaration on the Principles of International Law of 1970 (Deklaratsiya...), The Helsinki Final Act (Zaklyuchnyy..., 1975) and others, in which the Russian Federation was and formally remains a participant as the legal successor of the USSR. Russian aggression was the first attempt to change European borders by force since the end of the Second World War. The countries of the European Union, the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia and others have begun to introduce sanctions against violators of international law. However, powerful propaganda activities of the Russian Federation took place with little to no penalty in Western countries. The mechanisms of propaganda dissemination were different: actual pro-Russian misinformation, distortion of the war in Donbas facts, creation of pro-Russian organizations and relevant websites that cover the news from the preferable perspective. Its main messages: creating a hostile image of the US and spreading disinformation about the "Nazi" government in Kyiv and the supposedly large number of neo-Nazi organizations in Ukraine. All the states of the European Union and the Alliance turned out to be extremely vulnerable to the propaganda and disinformation spread by Russia and only in recent years they have been trying to activate and coordinate efforts to oppose them. Moscow uses various channels and means, including cyberattacks and the spread of fake news. Most often and obviously, three main narratives were advanced: nothing has changed for the better in Ukraine since the "color revolution" (Revolution of Dignity) supported by the West, the Ukrainian authorities provoke and support right-wing radical sentiments in society, the Ukrainian authorities are not interested in peace. The opinion was actively imposed that Ukraine was to blame for the war in

Donbas and that Kyiv did not have the political will to establish peace. Pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian ultra-left supporters, nationalist and Eurosceptic (isolationist) parties and groups made demands for Russia support. However, despite the importance of all the political and propaganda efforts, the economic factor played a key role in Russia's destruction of stable democratic values. Many countries suffered losses in exports due to sanctions imposed on Russia. Moscow tried (quite successfully!) to strengthen its own position, undermining the attractiveness of liberal traditions and democratic institutions. Everything that deepened the existing differences within the EU and NATO gives Russians an advantage.

After the victories of 1990–2000, the European liberal forces felt some loosening. A wave of populism arose, which began to effectively parasitize democratic values. And this happened with the support and even initiation of Russia. In addition, representatives of the establishment clearly demonstrated the key role of Russia in the destruction of stable democratic values (when "price tags win over values"). Some representatives of business circles, interested in restoring normal trade and economic relations with Russia, demanded the attenuation of sanctions or even their cancellation. So, in the current geopolitical situation, the basic values of the Free World come into conflict with purely mercantile interests.

The escalation of Russian aggression in February 2022 has changed the situation. Ukrainian society does not want peace at any price and is not going to sacrifice its sovereignty and freedom. Ukrainians have always fought for freedom and dignity, and this is the main difference between Ukraine and Russia. We [Ukrainians] have different political cultures. Therefore, there is a constant confrontation between the discourse of freedom and such of deprivation of liberty, which is a valuable confrontation between two systems, two different lifestyles and different frameworks that cause a sharp conflict. Ukrainian society has finally realized that Russia is not a neighbor generating problems with whom it is possible to come to an agreement by "just ceasing fire", but an "existential enemy" whose goal is the absolute destruction of the Ukrainian state.

The main goal of Russia in the modern confrontation is to force Western democracies to make significant concessions. One of the ways to force the West to undertake such steps is to create a kind of instability zone on the borders of Western countries and cause uncertainty within Western countries through political (including radical) or financial Russia-oriented groups or those having financial interest in such an orientation.

The main goal of the West in this confrontation is to preserve a unified policy that will allow proceeding maintenance of balanced and mutually beneficial political and economic relations between the Western countries in the face of Russia's efforts to create centers of instability in individual countries of the West and interstate relations between countries. One of the decisive factors for such a unified policy to function is the timely recognition by particular countries and international organizations of the threat posed by Russia's policy. As part of the definition and recognition of this threat, economic sanctions have been imposed on Russia. In addition, some Western countries recognize Russia as a threat to their national security.

Back in 1997, the Russian political scientist O. Dugin (1997) indicated in his manual that the existence of Ukraine within the borders recognized by international law is tantamount to inflicting a "terrible blow" on Russia's geopolitical security, tantamount to "invasion of its territory". And furthermore: "The Ukrainian question is the main and most serious problem that Moscow faces".

Russia's military aggression seemed a complete surprise to many in the world, as well as its destruction of the fundamental principles of international public law. However, the revanchism of post-Soviet Russia began immediately after the collapse of the USSR. It manifested itself in attempts to transform the CIS into a new allied state, prevent the expansion of NATO, and play its own role in the conflict in the Balkans. However, certainly, with V. Putin's accession to power, Russian expansionism acquired new dimensions. Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 had programmatic significance. The Bucharest NATO summit (2008) actually gave Russia *carte blanche* in the post-Soviet space, although even before it the West was completely indifferent towards Russian support for the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh... Blatant Russian Federation's aggression in Georgia in August 2008 also remained unpunished.

At the center of the mentioned confrontation happened to be Ukraine, which, due to historical and socio-economic circumstances, tends more to acquire the European model of civilization. The attack on Ukraine is only one part of the Russian leadership's aggressive policy, which seeks to take revenge for the defeat in the "Cold War" and restore the empire in the post-Soviet space. The reluctance of the Russian Federation to be guided by generally accepted civilized rules and norms of modern world state behavior indicates its intentions to return to such a model of the world order. Such an order

legitimizes the right of force, the right of a powerful state to interfere in the internal affairs of a weaker state, blackmailing and threatening used instead of economic incentives. Russia with its nuclear potential and energy capabilities has turned into a significant threat to the democratic values of the modern world. The international mechanisms created to maintain peace and stability in the world turned out to be unprepared for such a development.

However, the aggressor must be stopped. Ukraine is not the ultimate goal for V. Putin and the Russians, although it is existentially important. For Russia, the subjugation of Ukraine is not the final goal in itself, but a step towards restructuring the world order according to its own interests, a necessary prerequisite for a further attack on Europe, an example to intimidate the disobedient. Kyiv is fighting first and foremost for its future, but after winning this campaign and having Ukraine's resources at its disposal, the Russian Federation will become much more self-confident and aggressive. Everyone will actually see a different Russia. The West will have to stop it not on the Siverskyi Donets, but on the Vistula and the Elbe.

Russian aggression is absolutely natural. The Russian Federation never actually recognized the independence of Ukraine. The only question that remained was to influence it again through control over puppet power, or threatening with weapons. Preparations for the implementation of such a plan began with the beginning of V. Putin's presidency. It actively began with involvement in the Single Economic Space Treaty. A territorial conflict around the island of Tuzla began immediately after signing the treaty, with real interference in internal affairs during the Orange Revolution and the information war after its victory. The strengthening of anti-Ukrainian propaganda and the formation of an agent network in Ukraine intensified with the coming to power of V. Yanukovich. State authorities have become a tool for dismantling national independence. First of all, these are the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Prosecutor's Office, etc. The activities of the power structures were under the control of Russian special services, and the Ukrainian economy was under the influence of the Russian state capital.

Challenges to democratic values in the context of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine include international legal, economic, political and informational aspects. Russia considers Ukraine, like the West, as its existential enemy. Russia not only does not share, but aggressively denies such values as: human rights, liberalism, democracy, individual freedom, freedom of conscience, property rights

and freedom of entrepreneurship, people's right to self-determination, peaceful coexistence and respect for the sovereignty of countries, ideological pluralism. Using controversies, Russian theoreticians try to formulate their own values in such a way that they would deny Western ones. The Russian Federation does not accept Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state and pursues its [Russian] ultimate goal – the complete destruction of Ukraine as a subject of international law and geopolitical reality. Without Russian intervention, there would be no LNR/DNR (also known as LPR/DPR). The so-called "people's governor", P. Gubarev frankly admitted that, in general, there was no serious movement in Ukraine against European integration, and the people of Donbas would have silently agreed if Yanukovich signed the Association Agreement with the EU (Rushchenko, 2020).

So, the nature of the current war is the assertion that Ukraine and Russia belong to different civilizations. This opinion is held by many experts. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2007–2009), V. Ohryzko (2018) noted: "Russia and Moscovia were different and antagonistic from the very beginning: Russia was civilizationally and mentally an integral part of Europe, Moscovia – Asia". According to the Russian researcher A. Pyontkovskyy (2020), "The war imposed by the Kremlin on Ukraine is neither a territorial dispute over Crimea or Donetsk, nor an ethnic conflict. This is a decisive ideological clash between the heirs of Kyivan Rus and the heirs of the Golden Horde, in which the Horde ... is doomed".

Ukraine and Russia belong to two different civilizations. The war that Russia has been waging against Ukraine for several centuries has an inter-civilizational character and its newest phase fell in the second and third decades of the 21st century. It is not the result of a random coincidence of circumstances or the ill will of only one insane political criminal, because it logically continues the expansion of Russia to the west due to certain internal civilizational properties.

In order to win this war of civilizations, it is necessary to recognize its inter-civilizational character, to change the paradigm of national security. It is also important to plan the future in accordance with the context of the frontier of the Western world and the protection of common values at the crossroads of civilizations. The mass consciousness must get rid of the inherently fake slogan of Russian propaganda about "fraternal nations" or "one united people".

Victory over Russian aggression, particularly hybrid aggression, is possible only through the consolidation of the West (and Ukraine as its integral part). Our country [Ukraine] is certainly grateful to Europe and the USA, the entire democratic world for their

help, but Ukraine can really protect itself only on its own. The situation in public consciousness proves that there is no alternative in the formation of a new Ukrainian identity (both at the state and individual levels) solely because of Russophobia. Further progress in the creation of Ukrainian national identity is possible on the path of building Ukraine as a modern country. Contrary to the fundamental theses of globalization about the weakening of state sovereignty, the issue of sovereignty is crucial for Ukraine.

In the West, there is a fairly large part of people who naively continued to believe that Russia could be reformed in a democratic way. This was a key mistake: the history of the last 30 years, using the examples of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, proved that this is an absolute absurdity. It is worth posing a question not only about the coexistence of Ukraine and Russia, but also about the coexistence of the whole world and Russia. From a civilized point of view, such coexistence should be peaceful. If, of course, a wave of inadequacy does not come to the Moscow leadership once again, and they do not press the appropriate buttons. Ukraine came to the forefront of the struggle against Russian imperialism in its purest form, but it is also a struggle of worlds, different ideologies and worldviews.

Postmodern European consciousness assumes the elimination of conflict and excludes a black-and-white approach. "Military field trials" and torture (on the Russian side) are not enough proof for many. Europeans are looking for villains on both sides of the conflict. The Western view of events in Ukraine is distorted by the constant search for "balance". Some Europeans knew very well that Russia was an aggressor, but the usage of such terms was banned from public diplomacy discourse, which is based on the search for "peace". These postmodern European reflections brought even more damage when they were combined with the so-called German military guilt, which is focused on redemption exclusively when it comes to Russia. Germany has a special term – *Rußlandverstehe*, which is "understanding of Russia", although in reality it is not an understanding, but only a constant refrain that it is necessary to listen to Russia and its concerns, interests and legitimate concerns, to appease it. One of the most dangerous phenomena is anti-Americanism. Especially in France, Germany and Great Britain, where criticism of American methods and motives has deep cultural roots. It is assumed that the events in Kyiv or Tbilisi were somehow always organized in Washington (Vilson, 2015).

Putin's decision to start military expansion was not accidental, a kind of impulse to external irritation.

Everything points to the opposite thing: the invasion was preceded by a long preparatory stage.

Starting from February 24, 2022, the discussions about "fraternal nations", especially about "one united nation", ceased for good. Today, the difference is obvious to everyone in Ukraine and is becoming obvious to the rest of the world. The absolute majority of Ukrainian citizens (91%) in April 2022 did not support the thesis that "Russians and Ukrainians are one nation." In August 2021, there were 59% of them. Apparently, the number of respondents who self-identify as citizens of Ukraine – from 75 to 98%, and as "Europeans" – from 27 to 57% has significantly increased (Samoidentyfikatsiya..., 2022).

4. Conclusion

Today, Ukrainian society, political and state governing institutions are undergoing a difficult phase of their development. For the first time after the declaration of independence, the issues of preserving national-state sovereignty and restoring the integrity of Ukraine were so acutely put on the agenda. Moreover, threats and challenges arising in this context are not only products of external origin. Unfortunately, Russian aggression to a certain extent became possible precisely because of internal factors that motivated external interference in the internal affairs of our country. Among these is the lack of Ukrainian national identity formation. War is the most serious test for any nation, and it proved that Ukrainians are actually ready to meet each other despite their differences.

So, there are significant mental, historical and geopolitical differences between Ukraine and Russia, between Ukrainians and Russians. The essence of these disagreements lies in Ukraine's belonging to the European and Euro-Atlantic civilization.

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